RENÉ GUÉNON

STUDIES IN BUDDHISM

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Posthumous Collection

Auto-translated by A.I

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ON BUDDHISM[1]

Buddhism, as we have just said, seems closer—or rather less distant—from Western conceptions than the other doctrines of the East, and, consequently, easier for Westerners to study; this is no doubt what explains the marked predilection shown toward it by Orientalists. These, indeed, think they find there something that fits within the framework of their mentality, or that at least does not escape it completely; in any case, they do not find themselves, as with the other doctrines, hindered by a total impossibility of understanding which, without admitting it to themselves, they must nonetheless sense more or less confusedly. Such, at least, is the impression they experience in the presence of certain forms of Buddhism, for, as we shall say presently, many distinctions must be made in this respect; and, quite naturally, they wish to see in those forms that are most accessible to them the true and, as it were, primitive Buddhism, whereas the others would be, in their view, nothing more than alterations of greater or lesser lateness.

But Buddhism, whatever it may be, and even in the most "simplistic" aspects it may have assumed in some of its branches, is nevertheless still Oriental despite everything; thus Orientalists push assimilation with Western viewpoints far too far, for example when they wish to make it the equivalent of a religion in the European sense of the word, which moreover sometimes throws them into a curious embarrassment: have

1 For the benefit of readers who may have been acquainted with the first edition of this book, we consider it appropriate to indicate briefly the reasons that led us to modify the present chapter: when that first edition appeared, we had no reason to doubt that, as is usually claimed, the most restricted and most clearly anti-metaphysical forms of the Hīnayāna represented the very teaching of Shākyamuni; we did not have the time to undertake the long research that would have been necessary to investigate this question more deeply, and moreover what we then knew of Buddhism was in no way of a nature to prompt us to do so. But since then, things have taken on a wholly different aspect as a result of the works of A. K. Coomaraswamy (who himself was not Buddhist, but Hindu, which sufficiently guarantees his impartiality) and of his reinterpretation of original Buddhism, whose true meaning it is so difficult to disengage from all the heresies that later came to be grafted onto it and which we had naturally had chiefly in view in our first drafting; it goes without saying that, as regards these deviated forms, what we wrote at first remains entirely valid. Let us add on this occasion that we are always disposed to recognize the traditional value of any doctrine, wherever it may be found, as soon as we have sufficient proofs of it; but unfortunately, if the new information we have had has been entirely to the advantage of the doctrine of Shākyamuni (which does not mean of all Buddhist schools indiscriminately), it is quite otherwise for all the other things whose anti-traditional character we have denounced.

not some of them, shrinking from no contradiction in terms, declared that it was an “atheistic religion”? In reality, moreover, Buddhism is no more “atheistic” than it is “theistic” or “pantheistic”; what must simply be said is that it does not place itself at the point of view in relation to which these various terms have meaning; but if it does not place itself there, it is precisely because it is not a religion. Thus, even that which might appear least foreign to their own mentality, Orientalists still manage to distort by their interpretations, and in several ways at that, for when they wish to see in it a philosophy, they distort it hardly less than when they wish to make it a religion: if, for example, one speaks of “pessimism,” as is done so often, it is not Buddhism that is being characterized, or at least it is only Buddhism seen through the philosophy of Schopenhauer; authentic Buddhism is neither “pessimistic” nor “optimistic,” for, for it, questions are not posed in precisely that way; but one must believe that it is very inconvenient for some people not to be able to apply Western labels to a doctrine.

The truth is that Buddhism is neither a religion nor a philosophy, although, especially in those of its forms that have the preference of Orientalists, it is closer to one and the other in certain respects than are the traditional Hindu doctrines. Indeed, what is involved here are schools which, having placed themselves outside the regular tradition, and thereby having lost sight of true metaphysics, were inevitably led to substitute for it something that resembles the philosophical point of view to a certain extent, but only to a certain extent. One even finds there at times speculations which, if one considers them only superficially, may suggest psychology, but obviously this is not properly psychology, a thing that is wholly Western and, even in the West, quite recent, since it truly dates only from Locke; one should not attribute to Buddhists a mentality that proceeds quite specifically from modern Anglo-Saxon empiricism. For the comparison to be legitimate, it must not go as far as assimilation, and similarly, with regard to religion, Buddhism is in fact comparable to it only on one point, important no doubt, but insufficient to warrant concluding an identity of thought: this is the introduction of a sentimental element, which moreover can in all cases be explained by an adaptation to the particular conditions of the

period in which the doctrines affected by it came into being, and which, consequently, is far from necessarily implying that these doctrines are all of the same kind. The real difference of points of view may be much more essential than a resemblance which, in sum, bears chiefly on the form of expression of the doctrines; this is what those in particular fail to recognize who speak of "Buddhist morality": what they take for morality, all the more easily since its sentimental aspect can indeed lend itself to this confusion, is in reality envisaged under a wholly different aspect and has a reason for being that is quite different, and not even of an equivalent order. One example will suffice to make this clear: the well-known formula, "May beings be happy," concerns the universality of beings, without any restriction, and not only human beings; this is an extension of which the moral point of view, by its very definition, is in no way capable. Buddhist "compassion" is not the "pity" of Schopenhauer; it would rather be comparable to the "cosmic charity" of the Muslims, which moreover is perfectly transposable outside of all sentimentalism. It nevertheless remains the case that Buddhism is incontestably clothed in a sentimental form which, without going so far as "moralism," nonetheless constitutes a characteristic element that must be taken into account, all the more so because it is one of those elements that differentiate it very clearly from the Hindu doctrines and make it appear as certainly more distant than they are from traditional "primordiality."

Another point that it is good to note in this connection is that there exists a fairly close link between the sentimental form of a doctrine and its tendency toward diffusion, a tendency that exists in Buddhism as in religions, as is proven by its expansion throughout the greater part of Asia; but here again, the resemblance must not be exaggerated, and it is perhaps not very accurate to speak of Buddhist "missionaries" who spread outside India at certain periods, for, besides the fact that what is involved is in reality only a few isolated individuals, the word too inevitably evokes methods of propaganda and proselytism that are proper to Westerners. What is very remarkable, on the other hand, is that, as this diffusion took place, Buddhism declined in India itself and ended by becoming completely extinguished there, after having

produced there in its final phase degenerate and clearly heterodox schools, which are those targeted by Hindu works contemporary with this last phase of Indian Buddhism, notably those of Shankarâchârya, who never concern themselves with it except to refute the theories of these schools in the name of traditional doctrine, without moreover attributing them in any way to the founder of Buddhism himself, which clearly indicates that what was involved was only a degeneration; and what is most curious is that it is precisely these diminished and deviated forms which, in the eyes of most Orientalists, pass for representing as closely as possible the true original Buddhism. We shall return to this presently; but before going further, it is important to state clearly that, in reality, India was never Buddhist, contrary to what Orientalists generally claim, who wish in some sense to make Buddhism the very center of everything that concerns India and its history: India before Buddhism, India after Buddhism—such is the sharpest division they believe they can establish there, meaning moreover that Buddhism left, even after its total extinction, a profound imprint in its country of origin, which is completely false for the very reason we have just indicated. It is true that these Orientalists, who imagine that Hindus must have borrowed from Greek philosophy, could just as well maintain, without much greater implausibility, that they also borrowed from Buddhism, and we are not quite sure that this is not the underlying thought of some of them. It must be acknowledged that there are, in this regard, a few honorable exceptions, and thus Barth has said that “Buddhism had only the importance of an episode,” which, as far as India is concerned, is the strict truth; but despite this, the contrary opinion has not ceased to prevail, not to mention, of course, the crude ignorance of the vulgar public which, in Europe, readily imagines that Buddhism still currently reigns in India! What should be said is simply that, around the time of King Ashoka, that is, around the third century before the Christian era, Buddhism had in India a period of great expansion, at the same time as it began to spread outside India, and that this period was moreover promptly followed by its decline; but even for that time, if one wished to find a similarity in the Western world, one would have to say that this expansion was much more comparable to that of a monastic order than to that of a religion addressing the whole of the population; this

comparison, without being perfect, would assuredly be the least inaccurate of all.

That is not all with regard to the fantasies of Orientalists: we see some of them, such as Max Müller, endeavoring to discover "the germs of Buddhism," that is to say, at least according to the way they conceive it, the germs of heterodoxy, even in the Upanishads[2], which, forming an integral part of the Veda, are one of the essential foundations of Hindu orthodoxy; it would assuredly be difficult to push absurdity further and to give proof of a more complete incomprehension. Whatever idea one may form of Buddhism, it is nevertheless very easy to understand that, born in a Hindu milieu and arising in some sense from Hinduism, it must always, even while detaching itself from it, retain something in common with it, and that what is found to be similar on both sides is explained in no other way; M. Roussel has no doubt exaggerated in the opposite direction by insisting on the absolute lack of originality of this doctrine, but this opinion is at least more plausible than that of Max Müller and in any case implies no contradiction, and we shall add that it would rather express a praise than a criticism for those who, like us, adhere to the traditional point of view, since differences between doctrines, to be legitimate, can only be a simple matter of adaptation, bearing always only on forms of expression more or less external and in no way affecting the principles themselves; the introduction of the sentimental form itself falls within this case, at least so long as it leaves metaphysics intact at the center of the doctrine.

That said, one should now ask to what extent one can speak of Buddhism in general, as is customary, without exposing oneself to committing multiple confusions; to avoid these, one should instead take care always to specify which Buddhism is meant, for, in fact, Buddhism has comprised and still comprises a great number of different branches or schools, and one cannot attribute indiscriminately to all what belongs properly only to one or another of them. These schools can, taken as a whole, be arranged into the two great divisions that bear the names Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, which are ordinarily translated as "Great

2 The Upanishads, Vol. II, Introduction, pp. XXVI–XXVII and L–LII.

Vehicle" and "Lesser Vehicle," but which it might be more exact and at the same time clearer to render as "Great Way" and "Lesser Way"; it is far better to retain these names, which are those that authentically designate them, than to substitute denominations such as "Northern Buddhism" and "Southern Buddhism," which have only a purely geographical value, moreover rather vague, and which in no way characterize the doctrines in question. It is the Mahāyāna alone that can be regarded as truly representing a complete doctrine, including the properly metaphysical aspect that constitutes its higher and central part; by contrast, the Hīnayāna appears as a doctrine reduced, as it were, to its most external aspect and going no further than what is accessible to the generality of men, which justifies its designation, and naturally it is in this diminished branch of Buddhism, of which the Buddhism of Ceylon is currently the most typical representative, that the deviations to which we alluded above have occurred. It is here that Orientalists truly invert the normal relationships: they want the most deviated schools, those that push heterodoxy the furthest, to be the most authentic expression of the Hīnayāna, and that the Hīnayāna itself be properly the primitive Buddhism, or at least its regular continuation, to the exclusion of the Mahāyāna which would be, in their view, only the product of a series of more or less late alterations and additions. In this, they do nothing more than follow the antitraditional tendencies of their own mentality, which naturally lead them to sympathize with everything that is heterodox, and they also conform more particularly to that false conception, almost general among modern Westerners, according to which what is simplest—we would readily say the most rudimentary—must thereby be the most ancient; with such prejudices, it does not even occur to them that it might well be the exact opposite that is true. Under these conditions, one is entitled to ask what strange caricature may have been presented to Westerners as being the true Buddhism, such as its founder would have formulated it, and one cannot help smiling at the thought that it is this caricature that has become an object of admiration for so many of them, and that has seduced them to such a degree that there are some who have not hesitated to proclaim their adherence—moreover entirely theoretical and "ideal"—to this Buddhism which turns out to be so extraordinarily in conformity with their "rationalist" and "positivist"

cast of mind.

Naturally, when we say that the Mahāyāna must have been included in Buddhism from its origin, this must be understood with regard to what we might call its essence, independently of the more or less special forms that are proper to its different schools; these forms are only secondary, but they are all that the "historical method" allows one to see there, and this is what gives an appearance of justification to the assertions of Orientalists when they say that the Mahāyāna is "late" or that it is only an "altered" Buddhism. What further complicates matters is that Buddhism, in leaving India, was modified to a certain extent and in various ways, and that moreover it necessarily had to be modified in order to adapt itself to very different milieus; but the whole question would be to know how far these modifications go, and it does not seem very easy to resolve, especially for those who have scarcely any idea of the traditional doctrines with which it came into contact. This is notably the case for the Far East, where Taoism has manifestly influenced, at least as regards their modes of expression, certain branches of the Mahāyāna; the Zen school, in particular, has adopted methods whose Taoist inspiration is entirely evident. This fact can be explained by the particular character of the Far Eastern tradition, and by the profound separation that exists between its two interior and exterior parts, that is to say, between Taoism and Confucianism; under these conditions, Buddhism could in some sense take its place in an intermediate domain between the two, and one can even say that, in certain cases, it truly served as an "external covering" for Taoism, which allowed the latter to remain always very closed, much more easily than it could have without this. This also explains why Far Eastern Buddhism assimilated certain symbols of Taoist origin, and why, for example, it sometimes identified Kuan-yin with a Bodhisattva or more precisely with a feminine aspect of Avalokiteśvara, by reason of the "providential" function that they have in common; and this, let us note in passing, has again caused a misunderstanding among Orientalists who, for the most part, scarcely know Taoism except by name; they imagined that Kuan-yin belonged properly to Buddhism, and they seem completely ignorant of its essentially Taoist provenance. Moreover, it is quite their habit, when

they find themselves in the presence of something whose character or origin they do not know how to determine exactly, to extricate themselves by applying to it the label "Buddhist"; this is a fairly convenient means of concealing their more or less conscious embarrassment, and they resort to it all the more readily since, by virtue of the de facto monopoly they have managed to establish to their own advantage, they are more or less certain that no one will come to contradict them; what can people fear in this regard who lay down as a principle that there is no true competence, in the order of studies in question, except that which is acquired in their school? It goes without saying, moreover, that everything they thus declare "Buddhist" according to their fancy, as well as what truly is so, is in any case for them nothing but "altered Buddhism"; in a manual of the history of religions that we have already mentioned, and in which the chapter relating to China moreover bears witness as a whole to a most regrettable incomprehension, it is declared that "of primitive Buddhism, there remains no trace in China," and that the doctrines that exist there today "have of Buddhism only the name"[3]; if one understands by "primitive Buddhism" what Orientalists present as such, this is entirely correct, but one would first have to know whether one should accept the conception they form of it, or whether it is not rather this conception itself which, on the contrary, represents in fact only a degenerate Buddhism.

The question of the relations of Buddhism with Taoism is still relatively easy to elucidate, provided, of course, that one knows what Taoism is; but it must be recognized that there are more complex ones; this is especially the case when it is no longer a matter of elements belonging to traditions foreign to India, but indeed of Hindu elements, concerning which it may be difficult to say whether they have always been more or less closely associated with Buddhism, by virtue of its Indian origin itself, or whether they were integrated only afterward into certain of its forms. This is so, for example, with the Śaiva elements that occupy so large a place in Tibetan Buddhism, commonly designated under the rather inaccurate name of "Lamaism"; this is moreover not exclusively

3 Christus, ch. IV, p. 187.

particular to Tibet, for one also encounters in Java a Śiva-Buddha that testifies to a similar association pushed as far as it is possible. In fact, the solution to this question could be found in the study of the relations of Buddhism, even in its origin, with Tantrism, but the latter is so poorly known in the West that it would be almost useless to speak of it without entering into excessively long considerations that could not find a place here; thus we shall limit ourselves to this simple indication, for the same reason that led us to make only a brief mention of Tibetan civilization in spite of its importance, when we enumerated the great divisions of the East.

Now there remains for us one last point to treat at least summarily: why did Buddhism spread so extensively outside its country of origin and have such great success there, whereas in that country itself it degenerated fairly rapidly and ended by becoming extinct, and would it not be precisely in this outward diffusion that the true reason for being of Buddhism itself would reside? What we mean is that Buddhism appears as having been truly destined for non-Indian peoples; it was nevertheless necessary that it take its origin from Hinduism itself, so that it might receive from it the elements that were to be transmitted elsewhere after a necessary adaptation; but this task having been accomplished, it was in sum normal that it should disappear from India, where it did not have its true place. One could, in this regard, quite rightly make a comparison between the situation of Buddhism in relation to Hinduism and that of Christianity in relation to Judaism, on the condition, of course, of always taking account of the differences of points of view on which we have insisted. In any case, this consideration is the only one that allows Buddhism to be recognized, without committing illogic, as having the character of a traditional doctrine, which it is impossible to deny at least to the Mahāyāna, at the same time as the no less evident heterodoxy of the ultimate and deviated forms of the Hīnayāna; and it is also what explains what the mission of the Buddha could really have been. If the latter had taught the heterodox doctrine attributed to him by Orientalists, it would be entirely inconceivable that a number of orthodox Hindus would not hesitate to regard him as an Avatāra, that is to say, as a “divine manifestation,” of

which what is reported of him in fact presents all the characteristics; it is true that Orientalists, who intend to exclude as a matter of principle everything that is of a "non-human" order, claim that this is only "legend," that is to say, something devoid of all historical value, and that this too is foreign to "primitive Buddhism," but, if one removes these "legendary" traits, what remains of the founder of Buddhism as a purely human individuality? That would assuredly be very difficult to say, but Western "criticism" does not trouble itself over such trifles and, in order to write a life of the Buddha adapted to its views, it goes so far as to posit as a principle, with Oldenberg, that "the Indo-Germans do not admit the miracle"; how can one keep a straight face before such assertions? This so-called "historical reconstruction" of the life of the Buddha is worth exactly as much as that of his "primitive" doctrine, and it proceeds entirely from the same prejudices; in the one as in the other, the primary concern is above all to suppress everything that inconveniences the modern mentality, and it is by means of this eminently "simplistic" procedure that these people imagine they attain the truth.

We shall not say anything further on this subject, since it is not Buddhism that we propose to study here, and it was in sum sufficient for us to "situate" it, on the one hand, in relation to the Hindu doctrines and, on the other hand, in relation to the Western points of view to which one seeks to assimilate it more or less improperly. We can therefore, after this digression, return to the properly Hindu conceptions, but we shall not do so without formulating one last reflection that may serve, as it were, as a conclusion to all that has just been said: if Orientalists, who have in a sense "specialized" in Buddhism, commit so many serious errors concerning it, what can one think of the value of what they say about the other doctrines, which have never been for them anything more than an object of secondary and almost "accidental" study in relation to that one?

THE 'TRIRATNA'

To conclude the examination of the correspondences between different traditional ternaries, we shall say a few words about the ternary Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, which constitutes the Triratna or "triple jewel," and which some Westerners call, quite inappropriately, a "Buddhist Trinity." It must be stated at once that it is not possible to make an exact and complete correspondence between its terms and those of the Great Triad; nevertheless, such a correspondence may be envisaged at least under certain respects. First of all, indeed, to begin with what appears most clearly in this regard, the Sangha or the "Assembly,"[1] that is to say, the Buddhist community, obviously represents here the properly human element; from the special point of view of Buddhism, it in sum takes the place of Humanity itself[2], because it is for Buddhism the "central" portion thereof, that with reference to which everything else is envisaged[3], and also because, in a general way, any particular traditional form can concern itself directly only with its effective adherents, and not with those who are, if one may so express it, outside its "jurisdiction." Moreover, the "central" position given to the Sangha, in the human order, is truly justified (as could moreover equally and in the same way be that of its equivalent in any other tradition) by the presence within it of the Arhats, who have attained the degree of the "true man,"[4] and who, consequently, are in fact situated at the very center of the human state.

As for the Buddha, one may say that he represents the transcendent element, through which the influence of Heaven is manifested, and which, as a result, so to speak "incarnates" this influence with regard

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1 We avoid the use of the term "Church," which, although etymologically having approximately the same meaning, has taken on in Christianity a special sense that cannot be applied elsewhere, just as the term "Synagogue," which has even more exactly the same original meaning, has in its turn taken on a specifically Judaic sense.

2 One may recall here what we said at the beginning concerning the similar role of the term houei, or of what it represents, in the case of the Tien-ti-houei.

3 We have already explained this point of view, in another case, with regard to the "central" situation attributed to the Chinese Empire.

4 The Bodhisattvas, who could be made to correspond to the degree of the "transcendent man," thereby escape the domain of the terrestrial community and properly reside in the "Heavens," from which they "re-turn," by way of "descending" realization, only in order to manifest as Buddhas.

to his direct or indirect disciples, who transmit a participation in it from one to another by a continuous "chain," by means of the rites of admission into the Sangha. In saying this of the Buddha, we are moreover thinking less of the historical person considered in himself, whatever he may in fact have been (which has only a quite secondary importance from the point of view in which we place ourselves here), than of what he represents[5] by virtue of the symbolic characters that are attributed to him[6], and which make him appear above all under the features of the Avatāra[7]. In sum, his manifestation is properly the "descent of Heaven into Earth" of which the Emerald Tablet speaks, and the being who thus brings celestial influences into this world, after having "incorporated" them into his own nature, may be said truly to represent Heaven in relation to the human domain. Assuredly, this conception is very far removed from the "rationalized" Buddhism with which Westerners have been familiarized by the works of Orientalists; it may correspond to a "Mahāyānist" point of view, but that cannot constitute a valid objection for us, for it seems indeed that the "Hīnayānist" point of view that one has become accustomed to presenting as "original," no doubt because it accords all too well with certain preconceived ideas, is on the contrary, in reality, nothing other than the product of a simple degeneration.

One should moreover not take the correspondence we have just indicated for a pure and simple identification, for, if the Buddha represents in a certain way the "celestial" principle, it is nevertheless only in a relative sense, and insofar as he is in reality the "mediator," that is to say, he plays the role that is properly that of the "Universal

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5 It is moreover only in this respect that the name Buddha is given to him and that it truly suits him, since it is not an individual proper name, which, besides, could no longer truly apply in such a case (cf. Aperçus sur l'Initiation, ch. XXVII).

6 To say that these characters are symbolic, of course, in no way means that they were not in fact possessed by a real person (and we would even readily say all the more real insofar as his individuality effaces itself more before these characters); we have already spoken often enough of the symbolic value that historical facts themselves necessarily have for there to be any need to insist further upon it (cf. notably Le Symbolisme de la Croix, Foreword), and we shall merely recall once again, on this occasion, that "historical truth itself is solid only when it derives from the Principle" (Chuang-tzu, ch. XXV).

7 For further precision on this subject, we cannot do better than refer to the various works in which Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has treated this question, notably his Elements of Buddhist Iconography and The Nature of Buddhist Art.

Man."[8] Thus, with regard to the Sangha, in order to assimilate it to Humanity, we have had to restrict ourselves to the consideration of the latter in the exclusively individual sense (including the state of the "true man," which is still only the perfection of individuality); and one must further add that Humanity appears here as conceived "collectively" (since it is a matter of an "Assembly") rather than "specifically." One could therefore say that, if we have found here a relation comparable to that of Heaven and Man, the two terms of this relation are nevertheless included within what Far Eastern tradition designates as "Man" in the most complete and most "comprehensive" sense of this word, and which must indeed contain within itself an image of the entire Great Triad.

As for the Dharma or the "Law," it is more difficult to find a precise correspondence, even with reservations such as those we have just formulated for the other two terms of the ternary; moreover, the word dharma has in Sanskrit multiple meanings, which must be distinguished in the different cases in which it is employed, and which render a general definition more or less impossible. One may nevertheless remark that the root of this word properly has the meaning "to support,"[9] and in this respect draw a parallel with the Earth which "supports," according to what has been explained above; it is in sum a principle of conservation of beings, hence of stability, at least insofar as this is compatible with the conditions of manifestation, for all applications of dharma always concern the manifested world; and, as we have said with regard to the role attributed to Niu-koua, the function of ensuring the stability of the world relates to the "substantial" side of manifestation. It is true that, on the other hand, the idea of stability refers to something which, even within the domain of change, escapes that change, and must therefore be situated in the "Invariable Middle"; but it is something that comes from the "substantial" pole, that is to say, from the side of terrestrial influences, by the lower part of the axis traversed in the ascending direction[10]. The notion of dharma, thus understood, is

8 On this point, one may refer to what we have said above concerning the "transcendent man" and the "true man," and concerning the relations of the different degrees of the Taoist and Confucian hierarchies.

9 The root dhṛ means to carry, to support, to sustain, to maintain.

10 The root dhṛ is related, both in form and in meaning, to another root dhru, from which derives the word dhruva, which designates the pole; one may therefore say that the idea of the "pole" or of the "axis" of the manifested world plays an important role in the very conception of dharma.—On stability or immobility

moreover not limited to man, but extends to all beings and to all their states of manifestation; one may therefore say that, in itself, it is of a properly cosmic order; but, in the Buddhist conception of the "Law," its application is made especially to the human order, so that, if it presents a certain relative correspondence with the lower term of the Great Triad, it is again in relation to Humanity, always understood in the individual sense, that this term must here be envisaged.

One may further remark that there is always in the idea of "law," in all the senses and all the applications of which it is susceptible, a certain character of "necessity"[11] or of "constraint" that situates it on the side of "Destiny," and also that the dharma expresses in sum, for every manifested being, conformity to the conditions that are imposed upon it externally by the surrounding milieu, that is to say, by "Nature" in the most extended sense of this word. One can thus understand why the Buddhist Dharma has as its principal symbol the wheel, according to what we have set forth previously with regard to the meaning[12] of this symbol; and at the same time, by this representation, one sees that it is a passive principle in relation to the Buddha, since it is he who "sets the wheel of the Law[13] in motion." It must moreover obviously be so, since the Buddha is situated on the side of celestial influences just as the Dharma is on the side of terrestrial influences; and one may add that the Buddha, by the very fact that he is beyond the conditions of the manifested world, would have nothing in common with the Dharma[14]

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as an inverted reflection of principial immutability at the lowest point of manifestation, cf. Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps, ch. XX.

11 In this, depending on the cases, it may be a matter either of logical or mathematical necessity, or of "physical" necessity, or again of so-called "moral" necessity, rather improperly so called; the Buddhist Dharma naturally falls into this last case.

12 The Dharma-chakra or "wheel of the Law" is generally a wheel with eight spokes; these, which may naturally be related, in spatial symbolism, to the four cardinal points and the four intermediate points, correspond, in Buddhism itself, to the eight paths of the "Excellent Way," as well as to the eight petals of the "Lotus of the Good Law" (which may also be compared, moreover, to the eight "beatitudes" of the Gospel). A similar arrangement is found elsewhere in the eight koua or trigrams of Fo-hi; one may note in this regard that the title of the Yi-king is interpreted as meaning "Book of mutations" or "of changes in circular revolution," a meaning that presents an evident relation with the symbolism of the wheel.

13 He thus plays in this a role similar to that of the Chakravartī or "universal monarch" in another application of the symbolism of the wheel; it is moreover said that Shākyamuni had to choose between the function of the Buddha and that of the Chakravartī.

14 This absence of relation with the Dharma corresponds to the state of the Pratyêka-Buddha, who, having reached the end of total realization, does not "descend" again into manifestation.

if he did not have to apply it to Humanity, just as, according to what we have seen above, Providence would have nothing in common with Destiny without Man, who links together these two extreme terms of the "universal ternary."

THE TREE AND THE VAJRA

We have considered above the schema of the tree with three branches and three roots, constructed upon the general symbol of analogy and capable of being envisaged in the two opposite senses; we shall add here a few further complementary remarks on this subject, which will bring out more clearly the close connection existing between symbols of the "World Axis" that are apparently different. Indeed, as it is easy to realize from the figure below, the schema in question is, fundamentally, identical with the figure of the double vajra, whose two opposite extremities likewise reproduce the analogical symbolism of which we have spoken. In one of our previous studies in which the vajra was discussed, we had already pointed out this similarity with regard to the triplicity that is often encountered in "axial" symbolism, representing at once the axis itself, naturally occupying the central position, and the two cosmic currents of right and left that accompany it, a triplicity of which certain representations of the "World Tree" are an example; we remarked that, "in this case, the double triplicity of the branches and the roots recalls even more exactly that of the two extremities of the vajra," which, as is known, are in the form of a trident or trishūla[1].

However, one might ask whether the connection thus established between the tree and the symbol of lightning, which may at first sight appear to be two quite distinct things, is capable of going still further than the mere fact of this "axial" significance that they manifestly have in common; the answer to this question is found in what we have said concerning the igneous nature of the "World Tree," with which Agni himself, as Vanaspati, is identified in Vedic symbolism, and of which, as

1 Les armes symboliques.—On representations of the vajra, see A. K. Coomaraswamy, Elements of Buddhist Iconography.

a result, the "column of fire" is an exact equivalent as a representation of the axis. It is evident that lightning is likewise of an igneous or luminous nature; moreover, the flash of lightning is one of the most usual symbols of "illumination," understood in the intellectual or spiritual sense. The "Tree of Light" of which we have spoken traverses and illuminates all the worlds; according to the passage of the Zohar cited in this connection by A. Coomaraswamy, "the illumination begins at the summit and extends in a straight line through the entire trunk"; and this propagation of light can easily evoke the idea of lightning. Moreover, in a general way, the "World Axis" is always regarded more or less explicitly as luminous; we have already had occasion to recall that Plato, in particular, describes it as a "luminous axis of diamond," which precisely again relates directly to one of the aspects of the vajra, since the latter has at once the meaning of "lightning" and that of "diamond"[2].

There is still something else: one of the most widespread designations of the axial tree, in the various traditions, is that of the "Tree of Life"; now one knows what immediate relation traditional doctrines establish between "Light" and "Life"; we shall not insist further upon this, having already treated this question[3]; we shall merely recall once again, as bearing immediately upon our subject, the fact that the Hebrew Kabbalah unites the two notions in the symbolism of the "dew of light" emanating from the "Tree of Life." Moreover, in other passages of the Zohar that Mr. Coomaraswamy likewise cites in the course of his study on the "inverted tree," and where there is question of two trees, one superior and the other inferior, thus in some sense superposed, these two trees are designated respectively as the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of Death." This, which moreover recalls the role of the two symbolic trees of the terrestrial Paradise, is again particularly significant for completing the comparison that we presently have in view, for these meanings of "life" and "death" are indeed also attached to the double

2 We have also, in this connection, drawn a parallel with the Buddhist symbolism of the "Diamond Throne," situated at the foot of the axial tree; in all this, one must consider in the diamond, on the one hand, its luminosity, and, on the other, the character of indivisibility and inalterability, which is an image of the essential immutability of the axis.

3 Verbum, Lux et Vita.

aspect of lightning, represented by the two opposite directions of the vajra, as we have explained previously[4]. As we said at that time, what is involved here in reality, in the most general sense, is the double power of production and destruction of which life and death are the expression in our world, and which is related to the two phases of "expiration" and "inspiration" of universal manifestation; and the correspondence of these two phases is also clearly indicated in one of the texts of the Zohar to which we have just alluded, for the two trees are there represented as ascending and descending, so as in some sense to take the place of one another, following the alternation of day and night; does this not complete the demonstration of the perfect coherence of all this symbolism?

4 See Les armes symboliques.

APPENDIX A: THE IDEA OF THE CENTRE IN THE TRADITIONS OF ANTIQUITY

At the end of one of our most recent articles (March 1926), we alluded to the "Center of the World" and to the various symbols that represent it; we must return to this idea of the Center, which is of the greatest importance in all ancient traditions, and indicate some of the principal meanings attached to it. For moderns, indeed, this idea no longer immediately evokes everything that the ancients saw in it; there as in everything that touches symbolism, many things have been forgotten, and certain ways of thinking seem to have become totally foreign to the great majority of our contemporaries; it is therefore appropriate to insist upon it all the more, inasmuch as incomprehension is more general and more complete in this regard.

The Center is, above all, the origin, the point of departure of all things; it is the principial point, without form and without dimensions, hence indivisible, and, as a result, the only image that can be given of primordial Unity. From it, by its irradiation, all things are produced, just as Unity produces all numbers, without its essence being modified or affected in any way. There is here a complete parallelism between two modes of expression: geometric symbolism and numerical symbolism, such that one may employ them indifferently and one even passes from one to the other in the most natural way. One must not forget, moreover, that, in the one case as in the other, it is always a matter of symbolism: arithmetical unity is not metaphysical Unity, it is only a figure of it, but a figure in which there is nothing arbitrary, for there exists between the one and the other a real analogical relation, and it is this relation that makes it possible to transpose the idea of Unity beyond the domain of quantity, in the transcendental order. The same is true of the idea of the Center; this also is susceptible of a similar transposition, by which it divests itself of its spatial character, which is no longer evoked except as

a symbol: the central point is the Principle, it is pure Being; and the space that it fills with its radiance, and which exists only by that radiance itself (the Fiat Lux of Genesis), without which that space would be only “privation” and nothingness, is the World in the most extended sense of this word, the ensemble of all beings and of all states of existence that constitute universal manifestation.

The simplest representation of the idea we have just formulated is the point at the center of the circle (fig. 1): the point is the emblem of the Principle, the circle is that of the World. It is impossible to assign to the use of this figure any origin whatsoever in time, for it is frequently encountered on prehistoric objects; no doubt one must see in it one of the signs that are directly connected with the primordial Tradition. Sometimes, the point is surrounded by several concentric circles, which seem to represent the different states or degrees of manifested existence, arranged hierarchically according to their greater or lesser distance from the primordial Principle. The point at the center of the circle has also been taken, and probably from a very ancient period, as a figure of the sun, because the latter is truly, in the physical order, the Center or the “Heart of the World,” as we explained recently (April 1926); and this figure has remained down to our own day as the usual astrological and astronomical sign of the sun. It is perhaps for this reason that most archaeologists, wherever they encounter this symbol, claim to assign it an exclusively “solar” meaning, whereas it in reality has a far vaster and deeper sense; they forget, or they are ignorant, that the sun, from the point of view of all ancient traditions, is itself only a symbol, that of the true “Center of the World,” which is the Divine Principle.

The relation that exists between the center and the circumference, or between what they represent respectively, is already indicated clearly enough by the fact that the circumference cannot exist without its center, whereas the latter is absolutely independent of the former. This relation can be marked in a manner still clearer and more explicit by rays issuing from the center and reaching the circumference; these rays can obviously be figured in a variable number, since they are really in indefinite multitude like the points of the circumference that are their extremities; but, in fact, one has always chosen, for representations of this kind, numbers that have in themselves a particular symbolic value. Here, the simplest form is that which presents only four rays dividing the circumference into equal parts, that is to say, two rectangular diameters forming a cross within this circumference (fig. 2). This new figure has the same general meaning as the first, but certain secondary meanings are attached to it in addition, which complete it: the circumference, if one represents it as being traversed in a certain sense, is the image of a cycle of manifestation, such as those cosmic cycles of which Hindu doctrine, in particular, gives an extremely developed theory. The divisions determined on the circumference by the extremities of the branches of the cross then correspond to the different periods or phases into which the cycle is divided; and such a division may be envisaged, so to speak, on diverse scales, depending on whether the cycles are more or less extended: one will thus have, for example, and restricting ourselves to the sole order of terrestrial existence, the four principal moments of the day, the four phases of the lunation, the four seasons of the year, and also, according to the conception that we find as much in the traditions of India and of Central America as in those of Greco-Latin antiquity, the four ages of humanity. We are here only indicating these considerations summarily, in order to give an

overall idea of what the symbol in question expresses; moreover, they are connected more directly with what we shall have to say subsequently.

Among the figures that involve a greater number of rays, we must mention especially the wheels or "rouelles," which most commonly have six or eight (fig. 3 and 4). The "Celtic rouelle," which was perpetuated through almost the whole Middle Ages, appears in one and the other of these two forms: these same figures, and especially the second, are found very often in Oriental countries, notably in Chaldea and Assyria, in India (where the wheel is called chakra) and in Tibet. We showed previously (November 1925) the close kinship of the six-spoked wheel with the Chi-Rho, which in sum differs from it only in that the circumference to which the extremities of the rays belong is not ordinarily drawn there; and we said then that the wheel, instead of being simply a "solar" sign as is commonly taught in our time, is above all a symbol of the World, which one will now be able to understand without difficulty. In the symbolic language of India, one constantly speaks of the "wheel of things" or of the "wheel of life," which corresponds clearly to this meaning; there is also question there of the "wheel of the Law," an expression that Buddhism has borrowed, like many others, from earlier doctrines, and which, at least originally, refers especially to cyclical theories. One must further add that the Zodiac is also represented in the form of a wheel, with twelve rays naturally, and that moreover the name given to it in Sanskrit means literally "wheel of the signs"; one could also translate it as "wheel of numbers," according to the primary sense of the word rāshi which is used to designate the signs of the Zodiac[1].

In the article to which we alluded a moment ago (November 1925), we noted the connection that exists between the wheel and various floral symbols; we could even, for certain cases at least, have spoken of a true equivalence[2]. If one considers a symbolic flower such as the lotus, the

1 Let us also note that the "wheel of Fortune," in the symbolism of Western antiquity, has very close relations with the "wheel of the Law," and also, although this may perhaps not appear as clearly at first sight, with the zodiacal wheel.

2 Among other indications of this equivalence, as regards the Middle Ages, we saw the wheel with eight

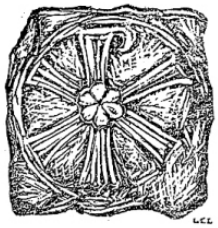
lily, or the rose[3], its blossoming represents, among other things (for these are symbols with multiple meanings), and by a very intelligible similarity, the development of manifestation; moreover, this blossoming is a radiance around the center, for here again it is a matter of "centered" figures, and this is what justifies their assimilation with the wheel[4]. In the Hindu tradition, the World is sometimes represented in the form of a lotus at the center of which rises Meru, the sacred mountain that symbolizes the Pole.

But let us return to the meanings of the Center, for, up to this point, we have in sum set forth only the first of all, that which makes it the image of the Principle; we shall find another in the fact that the Center is properly the "middle," the point equidistant from all the points of the circumference, and which divides every diameter into two equal parts. In what precedes, the Center was considered in some sense before the circumference, which has reality only by its radiance; now, it is envisaged in relation to the realized circumference, that is to say, it is a matter of the action of the Principle within creation. The middle between the extremes represented by opposite points of the circumference is the place where the contrary tendencies, leading to these extremes, neutralize one another so to speak and are in perfect equilibrium. Certain schools of Muslim esoterism, which attribute to the cross a symbolic value of the greatest importance, call the center of this cross a "divine station" (maqâmul-ilahi), designating it as the place

spokes and a flower with eight petals figured opposite one another on the same sculpted stone, set into the façade of the former church of Saint-Mexme of Chinon, and which dates very probably from the Carolingian period.

3 The lily has six petals; the lotus, in representations of the most common type, has eight; the two forms thus correspond to the wheels with six and eight spokes. As for the rose, it is figured with a variable number of petals, which can modify its meaning or at least give it diverse nuances.—On the symbolism of the rose, see the very interesting article by Mr. Charbonneau-Lassay (Regnabit, March 1926) [cf. L. Charbonneau-Lassay, "The Emblematic Iconography of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Symbolism of the Rose," Regnabit, 5th year, no. 10, March 1926, pp. 297–310, reprinted in Stefano Salzani – PierLuigi Zoccatelli, Hermeticism and Christic Emblematics in the Life and Work of Louis Charbonneau-Lassay (1871–1946), Milan–Paris: Archè-Edidit, 1996, pp. 153–176].

4 In the figure of the Chi-Rho with the rose, from the Merovingian period, which was reproduced by Mr. Charbonneau-Lassay (March 1926, p. 298), the central rose has six petals that are oriented according to the branches of the Chi-Rho; moreover, the latter is enclosed in a circle, which makes its identity with the six-spoked wheel appear as clearly as possible [cf. ibid., p. 298 (Hermeticism and Christic Emblematics in the Life and Work of Louis Charbonneau-Lassay [1871–1946], op. cit., p. 155). Here is the illustration in question :



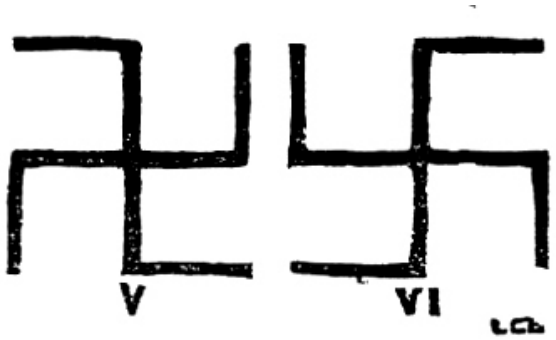
Le Chrisme à la Rose sur terre cuite mérovingienne
Musée des Antiquaires de l'Ouest à Poitiers.

where all contraries are unified, where all oppositions are resolved. The idea that is expressed more particularly here is therefore the idea of equilibrium, and this idea is one with that of harmony; they are not two different ideas, but only two aspects of one and the same idea. There is yet a third aspect of this one, more specially linked to the moral point of view (though capable of receiving other meanings as well), and this is the idea of justice; one can, by this, connect with what we are saying here the Platonic conception according to which virtue consists in a just mean between two extremes. From a point of view much more universal, Far Eastern traditions speak unceasingly of the "Invariable Middle," which is the point where the "Activity of Heaven" is manifested; and, according to Hindu doctrine, at the center of every being, as of every state of cosmic existence, there resides a reflection of the supreme Principle.

Equilibrium itself, moreover, is in truth only the reflection, in the order of manifestation, of the absolute immutability of the Principle; to consider things under this new relation, one must regard the circumference as being in motion around its center, which alone does not participate in this motion. The very name of the wheel (rota) immediately evokes the idea of rotation; and this rotation is the figure of the continual change to which all manifested things are subjected; in such a movement, there is only one unique point that remains fixed and immutable, and that point is the Center. This brings us back to the cyclical conceptions of which we have said a few words above: the course of any cycle whatsoever, or the rotation of the circumference, is the succession, whether in the temporal mode or in any other mode; the fixity of the center is the image of eternity, where all things are present in perfect simultaneity. The circumference can turn only around a fixed center; likewise, change, which is not sufficient to itself, necessarily presupposes a principle that is outside change: this is Aristotle's "unmoved mover" (see our article of December 1925), which is again represented by the Center. The immutable Principle is therefore at the same time, and by the very fact that everything that exists, everything that changes or moves, has reality only by it and depends totally upon it, it is, we say, that which gives motion its first impulse, and also that

which thereafter governs and directs it, that which gives it its law, the conservation of the order of the World being in some sense only a prolongation of the creative act. It is, according to a Hindu expression, the “internal ordainer” (antar-yâmî), for it directs all things from within, itself residing at the most interior point of all, which is the Center.

Instead of the rotation of a circumference around its center, one may also envisage that of a sphere around a fixed axis; the symbolic meaning is exactly the same. This is why the representations of the “World Axis,” of which we have already spoken (see December 1925 and March 1926), are so numerous and so important in all ancient traditions; and the general sense is fundamentally the same as that of the figures of the “Center of the World,” except perhaps in that they evoke more directly the role of the immutable Principle with regard to universal manifestation than do the other relations under which the Center may likewise be considered. When the sphere, terrestrial or celestial, accomplishes its revolution around its axis, there are on this sphere two points that remain fixed: these are the poles, which are the extremities of the axis, or its points of meeting with the surface of the sphere; and this is why the idea of the Pole is still an equivalent of the idea of the Center. The symbolism that relates to the Pole, and which sometimes assumes very complex forms, is also found in all traditions, and it even holds a considerable place there; if most modern scholars have not noticed it, that is again a proof that true understanding of symbols is entirely lacking to them.



One of the most striking figures in which the ideas we have just set forth are summed up is that of the swastika (fig. 5 and 6), which is essentially

the "sign of the Pole"[5]; moreover, we think that, in modern Europe, its true meaning has never been made known up to the present. One has vainly sought to explain this symbol by the most fanciful theories; one has gone so far as to see in it the schema of a primitive instrument intended for the production of fire; in truth, if it sometimes does indeed have a certain relation with fire, it is for quite other reasons. Most often, one makes of it a "solar" sign, which it could have become only accidentally and in a rather indirect manner; we could repeat here what we said above concerning the wheel and the point at the center of the circle. Those who have been closest to the truth are those who have regarded the swastika as a symbol of movement, but this interpretation is still insufficient, for it is not a matter of any movement whatsoever, but of a rotational movement accomplished around an immutable center or axis; and it is precisely the fixed point that is the essential element to which the symbol in question relates directly. The other meanings that the same figure involves are all derived from that one: the Center impresses movement upon all things, and, since movement represents life, the swastika thereby becomes a symbol of life, or, more exactly, of the vivifying role of the Principle in relation to the cosmic order.

If we compare the swastika to the figure of the cross inscribed in the circumference (fig. 2), we can realize that these are, fundamentally, two equivalent symbols; but rotation, instead of being represented by the tracing of the circumference, is only indicated in the swastika by the lines added to the extremities of the branches of the cross and forming with these right angles; these lines are tangents to the circumference, which mark the direction of the movement at the corresponding points. Since the circumference represents the World, the fact that it is, so to speak, implied indicates very clearly that the swastika is not a figure of the World, but indeed of the action of the Principle with regard to the World[6].

If one relates the swastika to the rotation of a sphere such as the celestial sphere around its axis, it must be supposed to be drawn in the equatorial

5 In the West the swastika is often designated under the name of "gammadion cross" because each of its branches has the form of the Greek letter gamma.

6 The same remark would also hold for the Chi-Rho compared to the wheel.

plane, and then the central point will be the projection of the axis on this plane which is perpendicular to it. As for the direction of rotation indicated by the figure, its importance is only secondary; in fact, one finds both of the two forms that we have reproduced above[7], and this without there always being any need to see in it an intention to establish between them any opposition whatsoever[8]. We know well that, in certain countries and at certain epochs, schisms may have occurred whose partisans deliberately gave the figure an orientation contrary to that which was in use in the milieu from which they were separating, in order to affirm their antagonism by an external manifestation; but this in no way affects the essential meaning of the symbol, which remains the same in all cases.

The swastika is far from being an exclusively Oriental symbol as is sometimes believed; in reality, it is one of those that are most generally widespread, and one encounters it almost everywhere, from the Far East to the Far West, for it exists even among certain indigenous peoples of North America. At the present time, it has been preserved especially in India and in Central and Eastern Asia, and it is probably only in these regions that one still knows what it signifies; yet, in Europe itself, it has not entirely disappeared[9]. In Lithuania and Courland, peasants still trace this sign in their houses; no doubt they no longer know its meaning and see in it only a sort of protective talisman; but what is perhaps most curious is that they give it its Sanskrit name swastika[10]. In antiquity, we find this sign, in particular, among the Celts and in pre-Hellenic

7 The word swastika is, in Sanskrit, the only one that serves in all cases to designate the symbol in question; the term sauwastika, which some have applied to one of the two forms in order to distinguish it from the other (which alone would then be the true swastika), is in reality only an adjective derived from swastika, indicating what relates to this symbol or to its meanings.

8 The same remark could be made for other symbols, and notably for the Constantinian Chi-Rho, in which the P is sometimes reversed; it has sometimes been thought that one must then regard it as a sign of the Antichrist; this intention may indeed have existed in certain cases but there are others where it is manifestly impossible to admit it (in the catacombs for example). Likewise, the corporate "numeral four" sign, which is moreover only a modification of this same P of the Chi-Rho (see our article of November 1925) [cf. here chapter 2] is indifferently turned in one direction or the other, without one even being able to attribute this fact to a rivalry between different guilds or to their desire to distinguish themselves from one another, since one finds both forms in marks belonging to the same guild.

9 We are not alluding here to the wholly artificial use of the swastika, notably by certain German political groupings, who have made of it quite arbitrarily a sign of anti-Semitism, on the pretext that this emblem would be proper to the so-called "Aryan race"; that is pure fancy.

10 Lithuanian is moreover, of all European languages, the one that has the most resemblance to Sanskrit.

Greece[11]; and, in the West again, as Mr. Charbonneau-Lassay recently said here (March 1926, pp. 302-303), it was formerly one of the emblems of Christ, and it even remained in use as such until about the end of the Middle Ages. Like the point at the center of the circle and like the wheel, this sign incontestably goes back to prehistoric times; and for our part, we see in it again, without any hesitation, one of the vestiges of the primordial Tradition.

We have not yet finished indicating all the meanings of the Center: if it is first a point of departure, it is also a point of arrival; everything issues from it, and everything must finally return to it. Since all things exist only by the Principle and could not subsist without it, there must be between them and it a permanent link, figured by the rays joining to the center all the points of the circumference; but these rays can be traversed in two opposite directions: first from the center to the circumference, and then from the circumference back toward the center. There are here as it were two complementary phases, of which the first is represented by a centrifugal movement and the second by a centripetal movement; these two phases can be compared to those of breathing, according to a symbolism to which Hindu doctrines often refer; and, on the other hand, there is also in it an no less remarkable analogy with the physiological function of the heart. Indeed, the blood leaves the heart, spreads throughout the whole organism which it vivifies, then returns to the heart; the role of the latter as organic center is therefore truly complete and corresponds entirely to the idea that we must, in a general way, form of the Center in the fullness of its meaning.

All beings, depending on their Principle in everything that they are, must, consciously or unconsciously, aspire to return toward it; this tendency to return toward the Center also has, in all traditions, its symbolic representation. We mean ritual orientation, which is properly the direction toward a spiritual center, a terrestrial and sensible image of the true "Center of the World"; the orientation of Christian churches is

11 There exist various variants of the swastika, for example a form with curved branches (having the appearance of two crossed S's) that we saw notably on a Gallic coin. On the other hand, certain figures that have kept only a purely decorative character, like that to which one gives the name "Greek key," are originally derived from the swastika.

in the end only a particular case of it and relates essentially to the same idea, which is common to all religions. In Islam, this orientation (qibla) is like the materialization, if one may so express it, of the intention (niyya) by which all the powers of the being must be directed toward the Divine Principle[12]; and one could easily find many other examples. There would be much to say on this question; no doubt we shall have some occasions to return to it in the course of these studies, and that is why we content ourselves, for the moment, with indicating more briefly the last aspect of the symbolism of the Center.

In summary, the Center is at once the principle and the end of all things; it is, according to a well-known symbolism, the alpha and the omega. Better still, it is the principle, the middle, and the end; and these three aspects are represented by the three elements of the monosyllable Aum, to which Mr. Charbonneau-Lassay alluded lately as an emblem of Christ (March 1926, p. 303), and whose association with the swastika, among the signs of the monastery of the Carmelites of Loudun, seems to us particularly significant. Indeed, this symbol, much more complete than the alpha and the omega, and susceptible of meanings that could give rise to almost indefinite developments, is, by one of the most astonishing concordances that one can encounter, common to the ancient Hindu tradition and to the Christian esoterism of the Middle Ages; and, in the one and the other case, it is likewise, and par excellence, a symbol of the Word, which is indeed truly the true “Center of the World.”which, as a result, so to speak “incarnates” this influence with regard

12 The word “intention” must be taken here in its strictly etymological sense (from in-tendere, to tend toward).

APPENDIX B: ASCESIS AND ASCETICISM

We have noted on various occasions that some people make between the terms "ascetic" and "mystical" a rather ill-justified comparison; to dispel any confusion in this regard, it suffices to realize that the word "ascesis" properly designates a methodical effort to attain a certain goal, and more particularly a goal of a spiritual order[1], whereas mysticism, by reason of its passive character, implies rather, as we have already said often, the absence of any definite method[2]. On the other hand, the word "ascetic" has taken on a more restricted sense than that of "ascesis," for it is applied almost exclusively within the religious domain, and that is perhaps what explains to a certain extent the confusion of which we speak, for it goes without saying that everything that is "mystical," in the current acceptation of this word, also belongs to this same domain; but one must be careful not to believe that, conversely, everything that is of a religious order is thereby more or less closely akin to mysticism, which is a strange error committed by certain moderns, and above all, it is good to note, by those who are most openly hostile to any religion.

There is another word derived from "ascesis," that of "asceticism," which perhaps lends itself still more to confusions, because it has been clearly diverted from its primitive sense, to such a point that, in ordinary language, it has come to be hardly anything more than a synonym of "austerity." Now, it is evident that most mystics devote themselves to austerities, sometimes even excessive ones, although they are moreover not the only ones, for that is a rather general characteristic of "religious life" as it is conceived in the West, by virtue of the very widespread idea that attributes to suffering, and especially to voluntary suffering, a value proper to it in itself; it is also certain that, in a general way,

1 It is perhaps not useless to say that this word "ascesis," which is of Greek origin, has no etymological relation with the Latin ascendere, for there are those who allow themselves to be misled in this respect by a purely phonetic and wholly accidental similarity between these two words; moreover, even if ascesis aims to obtain an "ascent" of the being toward states more or less elevated, it is evident that the means must in no case be confused with the result.

2 Cf. Aperçus sur l'Initiation, pp. 12–13.

this idea, which has nothing in common with the original sense of ascesis and is in no way inseparable from it, is still more particularly accentuated among mystics, but, let us repeat, it is far from belonging to them exclusively[3]. On the other hand, and it is no doubt this that makes it possible to understand how asceticism has commonly taken on such a meaning, it is natural that any ascesis, or any rule of life aiming at a spiritual goal, should assume in the eyes of "worldly" people an appearance of austerity, even if it in no way implies the idea of suffering, and quite simply because it necessarily sets aside or neglects the things that they themselves regard as the most important, if not even as altogether essential to human life, and the pursuit of which fills their whole existence.

When one speaks of asceticism as one ordinarily does, that seems to imply still something else: that what should normally be only a simple means having a preparatory character is too often taken for a true end; we believe we are not exaggerating in saying that, for many religious minds, asceticism does not tend toward the effective realization of spiritual states, but has as its sole motive the hope of a "salvation" that will be attained only in the "other life." We do not wish to insist upon it unduly, but it seems indeed that, in such cases, the deviation is no longer only in the sense of the word, but in the thing itself that it designates; deviation, we say, not certainly because there would be in the desire for "salvation" something more or less illegitimate, but because a true ascesis must propose to itself results that are more direct and more precise. Such results, whatever moreover the degree to which they may go, are, within the exoteric and religious order itself, the true goal of the "ascetic"; but how many are there, nowadays at least, who suspect that they can thus be attained by an active way, therefore wholly other than the passive way of mystics?

Be that as it may, the meaning of the word "ascesis" itself, if not that of its derivatives, is sufficiently broad to be applicable in all orders and at all levels: since it is essentially a methodical ensemble of efforts tending toward a spiritual development, one may quite well speak, not only of a

3 Cf. Aperçus sur l'Initiation, pp. 177–178.

religious ascesis, but also of an initiatic ascesis. One must only take care to note that the goal of the latter is subject to none of the restrictions that necessarily limit, and in some sense by definition itself, that of religious ascesis, since the exoteric point of view to which the latter is linked relates exclusively to the individual human state[4], whereas the initiatic point of view includes the realization of supra-individual states, up to and including the supreme and unconditioned state[5]. Moreover, it goes without saying that the errors or deviations concerning ascesis that can occur in the religious domain could not be found again in the initiatic domain, for they ultimately depend only on the very limitations that are inherent in the exoteric point of view as such; what we were saying a moment ago about asceticism, in particular, is obviously explicable only by the fact of the spiritual horizon more or less narrowly bounded that is that of the generality of exclusive exoterists, and consequently of "religious" men in the most ordinary sense of this word.

The term "ascesis," as we understand it here, is the one that, in Western languages, corresponds most exactly to the Sanskrit tapas; it is true that the latter contains an idea that is not directly expressed by the former, but this idea nonetheless falls strictly within the notion one may form of ascesis. The primary sense of tapas is in fact that of "heat"; in the case in question, this heat is evidently that of an inner fire[6] that must burn what the Kabbalists would call the "husks," that is to say, in sum destroy everything that, in the being, constitutes an obstacle to a spiritual realization; this is therefore indeed something that characterizes, in the most general way, any method preparatory to this realization, a method which, from this point of view, may be considered as constituting a "purification" prior to the attainment of any effective spiritual state[7].

4 It is well understood that what is involved here is individuality envisaged in its integrality, with all the extensions of which it is susceptible, without which the religious idea of "salvation" itself could truly have no meaning.

5 We hardly think it useful to recall that there lies precisely the essential difference between "salvation" and "Deliverance"; not only are these two aims not of the same order, but they do not even belong to orders which, though different, would still be comparable with one another, since there can be no common measure between any conditioned state whatsoever and the unconditioned state.

6 The relation of this inner fire to the "sulphur" of the Hermeticists, which is likewise conceived as a principle of an igneous nature, is too evident for it to be necessary to do more than indicate it in passing (see La Grande Triade, ch. XII).

7 One may compare this with what we have said concerning the true nature of initiatic trials (Aperçus sur l'Initiation, ch. XXV).

If tapas often takes the sense of painful or distressing effort, it is not because a special value or importance is attributed to suffering as such, nor because it is regarded here as something more than an "accident"; but it is because, by the very nature of things, detachment from contingencies is necessarily always painful for the individual, whose very existence also belongs to the contingent order. There is nothing here that could be assimilated to an "expiation" or to a "penance," ideas which, on the contrary, play a great role in asceticism understood in the vulgar sense, and which no doubt have their reason for being in a certain aspect of the religious point of view, but which manifestly could not find a place in the initiatic domain, nor moreover in traditions that are not clothed in a religious form[8].

At bottom, one could say that every true ascesis is essentially a "sacrifice," and we have had occasion to see elsewhere that, in all traditions, sacrifice, under whatever form it presents itself, properly constitutes the ritual act par excellence, that in which all the others are in some sense summed up. What is thus sacrificed gradually in ascesis[9] is all the contingencies from which the being must succeed in freeing itself as from so many bonds or obstacles that prevent it from rising to a higher state[10]; but, if it can and must sacrifice these contingencies, it is insofar as they depend on it and in that they in a certain way form part of it in some respect or other[11]. Since moreover individuality itself is also only a contingency, ascesis, in its most complete and deepest meaning, is ultimately nothing other than the sacrifice of the "I"

8 In the translations of Orientalists, one frequently encounters the words "penance" and "penitent," which in no way apply to what is in reality involved, whereas those of "ascesis" and "ascetic" would, on the contrary, suit perfectly in most cases.

9 We say gradually by the very fact that it is a matter of a methodical process, and moreover it is easy to understand that, except perhaps in some exceptional cases, complete detachment cannot take place all at once.

10 For this being, one may say that these contingencies are then destroyed as such, that is to say, insofar as they are manifested things, for they truly no longer exist for it, although subsisting without change for other beings; but moreover this apparent destruction is in reality a "transformation," for it goes without saying that, from the principial point of view, nothing that is can ever be destroyed.

11 One may also recall in this connection the symbolism of the "narrow gate," which cannot be passed through by one who, like the "rich" of whom there is question in the Gospel, has not known how to strip himself of contingencies, or who, "having wished to save his soul (that is to say, the 'I'), loses it" because he cannot, under these conditions, effectively unite himself to the permanent and immutable principle of his being.

accomplished in order to realize the consciousness of the “Self.”

APPENDIX C: RENÉ GUÉNON AND BUDDHISM - MARCO PALLIS

If certain readers, recalling the first editions of the works of the great departed jnânin, notably *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues* and *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Vêdânta*, if certain readers, we say, are somewhat surprised by the title that has been chosen for this study, we shall reply that it is not a question here of submitting René Guénon's views, whether earlier or more recent, on Buddhism, to any kind of critical examination, but rather of demonstrating that, despite certain difficulties of interpretation that arose in the past, the "Guénonian" point of view proves no less valid with regard to the Buddhist form of the Universal Tradition than in the case of the other forms which René Guénon treated specifically.

As for the aforementioned works, all that is important to say, in order to dispel any misunderstandings on this subject, is that, when the question of Buddhism was finally submitted to René Guénon some years ago, accompanied by doctrinal and textual references (part of which were provided to us by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy), René Guénon immediately decided that the passages in question concerning the original character of Buddhism would be either modified or removed, while at the same time adding other modifications relating to points which, being less important, had not been expressly brought to his attention.

What gave rise to the occasion to raise this question was the English translation of *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues* and a new English edition of *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Vêdânta*; the probability that these English translations would be read by Orientals of Buddhist tradition made a clarification rather urgent.

It should moreover be stated that, if René Guénon wished at the outset to place himself from the point of view of the great master of jnâna-

yoga in its Hindu form, Shankarâchârya, the latter's attitude toward the Buddhism of his time is fully understandable only if one takes into account the external necessities linked to the exact determination of the domains of two different traditions whose coexistence within the same civilization would hinder the economy of each.

For Shankarâ, it was above all a matter of safeguarding Hindu orthodoxy against any attempt, even the most justified in its own order, which could have led, even indirectly, to an internal rupture of its form. In pursuing this aim, which had become for him essential, Shankarâ had no reason to show indulgence toward a movement tending to escape the framework providentially established for Hinduism.

In such a case, the attack is launched by emphasizing the negative side of the allegedly opposed doctrine, or even the abuses to which this negative side might be liable to give occasion. In the particular case, it is significant that Shankarâ himself was the object of criticism on the part of other Hindus, who accused him of propagating a doctrine that was nothing but Buddhism in disguise. The concurrence between Shankarâ's attitude toward Buddhism and that of certain Hindus toward Shankarâ himself is moreover highly characteristic and, in truth, it is the second attitude that represents the deeper point of view, for, despite a very pronounced difference in expression and method, the spiritual position of Shankarâ, and thus of the Vêdânta, and that of Mahāyāna Buddhism are akin to the point that one can speak of a quasi-identity.

That being said, it remains for us to specify what René Guénon's works contain that is positive with regard to the Buddhist tradition.

The first example we shall give is of a completely general scope and consists in the fact—of which we ourselves have had experience on many occasions—that the Guénonian expression of metaphysical principles fully accords, and sometimes even textually, with those same principles as they are expounded in Tibet today. Indeed, it has happened to us more than once to cite some phrase of Guénon—but without mentioning the author's name—in order to illustrate some doctrinal

point, and to observe that the phrase in question was immediately approved, even "recognized," by our Tibetan interlocutors, including eminent Lamas, without their suspecting that it came from an authority foreign in race and traditional affiliation.

The fact that René Guénon did not treat Buddhism specifically and that he even, up to a certain point, misunderstood this form, in reality reinforces the thesis of the universality and intrinsic orthodoxy of the doctrine as expounded by him whose memory we honor. Tibet recognized it without knowing it, and this, it cannot be emphasized too strongly, constitutes in favor of René Guénon's work a testimony as powerful as it is impartial.

It must moreover not be forgotten that René Guénon, for his part, always recognized, without the slightest reservation, the value and orthodoxy of the Tibetan tradition and, by this fact, he implicitly recognized the authenticity of the trunk of which this tradition is only one branch among others (although one of the most remarkable), which largely neutralizes the doubts he still entertained some ten years earlier concerning original Buddhism. Indeed, René Guénon's point of view on the origin and nature of authentic traditions excludes a priori the possibility that a movement heterodox in itself could constitute the point of departure of a tradition in the true sense of that word.

René Guénon exerted in Tibet an influence somewhat unexpected; in the sense that we were led to compose a special adaptation of *La Crise du Monde moderne* for Tibetan use. On several occasions there had been talk of translations of this book into Oriental languages, in the hope that such translations would provide more or less disoriented Asians with a means of informing themselves about the true character of the manifestations of the modern world, and thereby contribute to consolidating among them the traditional spirit "folded back upon itself," as Guénon put it.

But the more this question was studied, the more one became convinced that a literal translation would not be suitable and that, in order to render

the exposition fully comprehensible to individualities with mental habits so different from our own, a broad adaptation was required with regard to expression, examples, and even the form of the work. We devoted ourselves to this task from the end of 1947, after our return from Tibet, and the work appeared in Tibetan in the autumn of 1950 under the title: Le Kâli-Yuga et ses dangers, somewhat belatedly, in view of the current situation in Central Asia, but it was impossible to have it appear earlier.

In order to ensure the work an incontestable traditional authority, it was presented in the form of a commentary on the "testament" of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, published shortly before his death, an extremely important document which treats the same subject but in a very condensed manner. On this basis, the argument unfolded in thirteen chapters, each devoted to a particular aspect of the modern crisis, beginning from principles, the whole being supported by numerous citations from Buddhist scriptures and illustrated with examples familiar to Tibetans, thus allowing them to "situate" each question in relation to their own experience. The material of the Tibetan work encompasses roughly La Crise du Monde moderne and *Le Règne de la quantité et les Signes des Temps*.

The quotations from Guénon himself and from other non-Buddhist authorities are presented in the following form:

"An eminent Lama of the West has taught,"

and, under this form, the Tibetans, who in no way suffer from the prejudices associated in the West with religious exoterism, experienced no difficulty in accepting them on the same footing as teachings coming from more familiar authorities. It is therefore permissible to say that, through this book, René Guénon's influence was exercised in a direct manner upon the Tibetan world.

Cyclical laws and their applications constitute a close link between the Hindu and Buddhist traditions on the one hand and the teaching of which René Guénon has been the most recent formulator on the other.

Orientals have generally remained very conscious of the existence of these laws, so that one does not have to convince them when it is a matter of drawing some consequence of immediate application from them, for example when alluding to the fact that the world is presently in an advanced stage of that dark age whose causes and tendencies René Guénon described with such marvelous clarity.

Tsong-Khapa, the Sage founder of the Gelugpas (also known as the "Yellow Hats"), an Order which counts among its members the Dalai Lama, had distinguished, within the Kâli-Yuga itself, a fifth cyclical stage which he gives the name "Age in which corruption goes from bad to worse" (literally: more and more), a period which evidently corresponds to the advanced "phase" of the Kâli-Yuga of which René Guénon speaks, and thus to the contemporary epoch.

In this regard, there is an interesting point to note: in Tibetan, the name of the Kâli-Yuga is translated as Nyigmai Tû, whose root nyig (snyigs) has as its primary meaning "impure sediment (or residue)," which immediately recalls what Guénon has often repeated, namely that the end of the cycle is characterized above all by the exploitation of everything that earlier periods had rejected, of which modern sciences, issued from the residues of the ancient sciences, provide only one example among many others. This term nyigmai, which, contrary to Tibetan usage, does not constitute a literal translation of the corresponding Sanskrit word, but which seems rather to draw out its ultimate implications, is rendered all the more striking by comparison with the formulations of Guénon we have just mentioned.

Another very important point of contact between René Guénon and Mahāyāna doctrine is formed by his article on Ascending and Descending Realization, which could well serve as an introduction to the doctrine, central to Buddhism when it is envisaged in its totality, of the Bodhisattva. This article moreover represents one of the rare occasions on which Guénon referred directly to Buddhist doctrines.

We would finally like to say a few words about the "King of the World,"

whose mysterious kingdom bears, in Tibetan and Mongolian tradition, the Sanskrit name of Shâmbala of the North, perhaps by allusion to the symbolically hyperborean localization of the Primordial Tradition. As for the name Agarttha, it seems totally unknown to the peoples in question.

The name Shâmbala, in India, designates a region of the North-West, near the city of Muzaffarpur, and what is highly significant is the fact that this place is indicated by tradition as the birthplace of the future Kalki-Avatâra. Guénon's opinion, according to which Ossendowski would have learned the name Agarttha, or rather Agharti, which in Beasts, Men and Gods replaces that of Shâmbala, otherwise than through the intermediary of Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, seems to us today difficult to sustain, for, as the Russian professor Georges Roerich recently explained to us, books with a more or less occultist tone, notably those of Saint-Yves, enjoyed great success in Russia during the years immediately preceding the First World War, so that it is very probable that a man such as Ossendowski knew them, or at least had heard of them.

One may wonder what reason led Ossendowski to prefer the name Agharti to Shâmbala, which is the one he would certainly have heard in Mongolia, but it seems to us that this can be explained simply by a desire to evoke a "sympathetic memory" among his Russian readers, by presenting them with a name they already knew from reading Saint-Yves. It would therefore in no way be a matter of plagiarism, but rather of a small authorial subterfuge with regard to his public, and, apart from this, the details of Ossendowski's account, as René Guénon rightly observed, are entirely plausible, at least insofar as they concern things he himself saw or people he met.

The same Professor Roerich, who traveled through Mongolia shortly after these events and who, moreover, has a perfect command of the language, confirmed a number of details mentioned by Ossendowski.

Mr. Georges Roerich also told us that most altars in Mongolian temples

are oriented toward the North, by allusion to Shâmbala, and that their vestibules are very frequently adorned with frescoes representing the "war of Shâmbala," that is to say the combat that will take place at the end of the cycle when the infidels will be destroyed and tradition restored. The traditional representation of the king of Shâmbala, presiding over the said holy war, is also found on a certain number of thankas or Tibetan banners of which we have seen a specimen quite recently.

We also owe to Mr. Roerich a somewhat astonishing piece of information: he told us that in 1928 special rites were performed in many lamaseries of Tibet and Mongolia in order to celebrate the consecration of a new king of Shâmbala; these rites took place, he said, everywhere there was a monastic college devoted to the study of the tantric doctrine bearing the name Kâla-Chakra or "Wheel of Time," whose first preaching is attributed to the Buddha Shâkya-Muni himself. The said doctrine and the corresponding methods of meditation are moreover included within the Anuttara Yoga, the "Yoga without superior," and they are also known under the name "science of the Bodhisattvas," that by whose thorough study it will be possible to attain Deliverance in the course of a single life.

It is said that the Doubtops (siddhas), holders of the powers conferred by this doctrine, on leaving this earth, retire to Shâmbala, and it is also for this reason that the king of Shâmbala is represented with a wheel in his hand. The supports of meditation employed in the Kâla-Chakra are in large part drawn from astrology, which moreover explains the name, and each star goes together with the visualization of a divine aspect which will successively become the object of the meditation of the one who strives to follow this path.

There exist in Tibet a good number of books dealing with the kingdom of Shâmbala, and one of them has been published in Europe accompanied by a German translation. This book, which bears the title Livre de route pour Shâmbala, has as its author a Panchen-Lama of the eighteenth century and comprises a treatise on sacred geography,

starting from the principal kingdoms known at that time, four in number, namely: the empires of China, India, Russia, and Rûm (the Ottoman Empire), after which it passes to the description of the symbolic route leading to the spiritual Center in question.

Related to the tradition concerning Shâmbala is that of the hero-king Gesar of Ling, whose epic was adapted into French by Mme David-Néel. In this poem, there is, unless mistaken, no specific mention of Shâmbala, and the connection between the two traditions emerges only from the moment when the hero, himself also a champion of the holy war against the impious, withdrew with his companions from the visible world, where he will nevertheless reappear at the end of the cycle in order to resume the combat interrupted in the battle of Shâmbala, an event which must precede the advent of the future Buddha, Chamba or Maitreya ("the Compassionate"), by whom the Golden Age will finally be restored.

The details we have just mentioned will inevitably recall analogous descriptions encountered in Christian, Islamic, and other traditions, but perhaps the most striking comparison of all is that which can be made between the Lamaist traditions and the legend of King Arthur and his knights, who also disappeared at a given moment but are destined to manifest themselves anew, at the sound of the trumpet that will awaken them from their long sleep, in order to drive from the Sacred Land the Saxon invaders, representatives of the infidels in the Celtic tradition.

It happened to us, during our stay in Shigatsé in 1947, to be questioned about the true meaning of this legend by Tibetans who, knowing how to read a little English, had encountered somewhere an allusion to the story of Arthur, and we did not hesitate to answer them that King Arthur was none other than the Western Gesar, just as Gesar is the Tibetan Arthur, the two being identical by their function. This response was received as entirely satisfactory.

We believed that we could render no better homage to the memory of René Guénon than by bringing some confirmations to his book *Le Roi*

du Monde, which is only one example among many others of the breadth of his views as well as of his astonishing intellectual penetration

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